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SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH COR MEMBER LAMENTS EXCESSIVE MINISTERIAL POWER;  
CAUTIONS ELECTION FRAUD

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CLASSIFIED BY: Angus T. Simmons, Team Leader, PRT Najaf,  
Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

This is a PRT Reporting Cable.

¶1. (C ) Summary: On February 25, Hussein Al-Shalan, a Council of Representative member from Diwaniyah Province, discussed with PRT Offs his concerns about the negative impact levied on Iraq by "murderous centralization" and an extreme, partisan focus by the ministries in the performance of their duties. Al-Shalan blames budget execution difficulties on ministries withholding funds to undermine opposing political parties in the governorates. He calls for the scientific application of government by managers rather than party whips. Al-Shalan also expresses his concern about dire consequences of likely election fraud by the powerful political parties and asks that the US "work tirelessly" to assure fair provincial elections. End Summary.

¶2. (C ) Diwaniyah Council of Representative Member Hussein Al-Shalan met with Team Leader and PRToffs at the REO for a general discussion on February 25. Al-Shalan is concerned about over centralization from Baghdad, and possible election fraud.

¶3. (C) Al-Shalan criticizes the national government for "murderous centralization" and for being "foolishly" controlled by excessive party alliances. He calls for the scientific application of government by managers rather than political hacks. (Note: This view was recently expressed to PRToffs by the head of the Karbala Women's Center, a view she says people in the street are attributing to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani; it would be better to see Iraq ruled by a fair secularist than a Muslim tyrant.) Budget execution, he says, is retarded by ministers withholding funds from departments and governorates solely to advance national party power. The negative consequences, he complains, fall upon the people in the streets. The GOI funds, he says, are as a result of the powerful, party dominated ministers distributed not to benefit the people but to forge party loyalty and assert political domination.

¶4. (C) Al-Shalan blames a rush to federalism for harmful turf wars between partisan officials at the national and provincial levels. He asserts that Iraqis lack sufficient commitment to the concept of a nation and that successful federalism requires that the many parts appreciate the importance of the whole. As an example, he points to a dispute between the Iraqi Minister of Education and the Diwaniyah Provincial government. The Provincial Government, he says, requested the removal of the

Director General (DG) of Education to allow for the installation of a party loyalist. Al-Shalan reports that the standoff between the Ministry and the Province has led the Ministry to withhold funding for education projects in Diwaniyah. It was suggested to Al-Shalan that the fault appears to be in part the Ministry's disregard for the COR budget allocations rather than an inherent deficiency in the federal system as the DG can properly stand firm against the province on an issue of federal personnel without extracting financial retribution from the citizens. Al-Shalan agrees but reports the COR lacks political ability to challenge the powerful ministry. He reports similar problems in Diwaniyah with the Ministry of Health.

15. (C) Al-Shalan expressed concerns about anticipated fraud in the 2008 provincial elections. The sheikh reports that ISCI is very concerned that it will not be able to control the IHEC. Based on his experience in the 2005 elections, where he claims he passed video taped evidence of fraud to the coalition authorities, he predicts that ISCI and other parties will resort to massive fraud to assure their electoral success. He believes that if the election process is fair that perception will contribute significantly to the stability of Iraq. On the other hand, he warns, electoral fraud on the scale he claims existed in the past election will unleash a public reaction that "U.S. forces will not be able to resolve." The U.S. must "work tirelessly" he believes to assure fair elections in Iraq. He also wants the U.S. to assist in voter education. PRToffs responded by noting that this is an Iraqi run election, not a U.S. run election, but the U.S. is available to provide certain assistance as requested by the Iraqi government to support the Iraqis and the UN in the UN's role as election monitor. Election fraud was widespread he claims in the last election but did not lead to more intense public reaction because most people saw the importance of unity. This time around, Al-Shalan believes, the intense popular dissatisfaction with the existing government will result in the people being less accepting of election fraud.

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16. (C) Asked about the anticipated elections law, Al-Shalan states that he does not know if the law will provide for open or closed lists. (He has not yet seen a version of the GOI draft.) He says he and most Iraqis support open lists but states the opposition to open lists includes ISCI, Dawa, and the Kurds.

17. (C ) Comment: The CoR Member's comments are focused on his concern that excessive control by powerful political parties can undermine two key initiatives for 2008: budget execution and fair elections. Budget execution can be distorted by the ministries' de facto, absolute discretion with regard to the budget allocation made to their ministries by the COR; the political parties are, through their absolute control of the various ministries, able to undo the hard fought political consensus reached by the legislative body. End Comment.  
SIMMONS